

A GARNER for the LONGINGS of LITTLE HEARTS

What Becomes of Letters to Santa Claus

Mrs. Pattie Lyle Collins, who
Receives all the Santa Claus Mail

SUCH a little tot she is that even when standing on tiptoe, her eager hands reach only part the way to the opening in the street-corner letter-box. A frown puckers her face as she vainly struggles to reach the letter slit with the somewhat soiled and crumpled envelope that she pushes upward.

"Want to mail your letter, little one? Let me do it for you," and a kind-hearted passerby stops to perform an act of kindness. Clapping her hands joyfully, the youthful letter-writer skips away.

Undoubtedly, she wrote the missive that she saw with gladness drop into the government mail receptacle, for, as the stranger slipped it into the slot, he noticed that it was addressed in a wavering, childish hand, to "Mr. Santa Claws."

"Poor little trusting heart," he murmured, sympathetically, "she will never hear from it again."

Nor will she, unless she confides its pleading contents to some one nearer home. For the letter is soon speeding, with bushels of others just like it, to the Dead Letter Office at Washington.

Every day in the year nearly 25,000 pieces of misdirected mail are sent to the Dead Letter Office, and, during the few weeks preceding Christmas, this number is increased by thousands. So the Dead Letter Office at this season becomes a gigantic garner for the longings of little hearts.

An extra force of clerks is put to work in the Dead Letter Office from the first of December until after the first of the year. Thus is Uncle Sam obliged to take formal notice of the Christmas tradition.

Situated on the south side of the spacious glass-roofed court, on the third floor of the great granite building, which houses the national Post-office, the Dead Letter Office is at all times peculiar in its appeal to the imagination.

To it comes all the mail matter that for any reason cannot be delivered, and one can scarcely visit it without thinking of the hopes deferred, the romances blighted, the riddles unsolved, to which it perhaps holds the key.

Thousands and thousands of letters come from children at this season, all addressed to Santa Claus. There seems to be a diversity of opinion as to where Santa Claus lives, the most frequent addresses being, "The North Pole" and "Heaven," though quite a few are addressed to Greenland, Iceland, and "Snowland."

Occasionally one sees an item describing somebody as the official Santa Claus of this, that, or the other post-office. Last summer a man who died in Connecticut was described as the post-office Santa Claus of the town in which he had lived, to whom, as the agent of certain philanthropic persons, were turned over all the letters addressed to Santa Claus found in the local post-office.

But that was a mistake, or, if true, the postmaster exceeded his authority.

Some years ago that was occasionally done. But in 1906 a wealthy woman who lives in Philadelphia applied formally to the post-office authorities for permission to take charge of some of the Santa Claus mail, and to answer some of the petitions contained therein.

The postmaster asked for a ruling on the subject. It was referred to the law bureau of the Post-office Department, at Washington, of which Judge Goodwin is the head, and he was obliged to regrettably inform the department that it had no right to deliver mail addressed to one person to any one else.

So the Santa Claus mail must go the way of all the other mail that reaches the Dead Letter Office. When it can neither be delivered to the addressee nor returned to

the slender, mail must, after a reasonable interval, be destroyed.

Because most of the Santa Claus mail eventually passes through the hands of Mrs. Pattie Lyle Collins, she is known to her associates in the big building as "Mrs. Santa Claus."

Mrs. Collins has been in the Post-office Department for twenty years, and is one of its most highly paid employees—a dead-letter expert.

She seems to know by instinct just what was in the writer's mind when he wrote the puzzling address that has baffled local postmasters and carriers. She speaks half a dozen languages, as well as her own; she is acquainted with all the lumber and mining camps in the Union, and she knows the nationality of the men who are employed in each.

In years gone by she used occasionally to tell some philanthropic friend of a particularly pathetic appeal, but since Judge Goodwin's ruling on the subject she has not been able to do even that.

The fact that the bulk of Santa Claus mail passes through Mrs. Collins' hands does not mean that most of it is illegible as to its address. It comes in envelopes of all sorts and sizes, but they are all addressed, with some variations of title, quite plainly to the same person, the children's saint.

One comes in the father's business-like office envelope; another is on tiny decorated stationery of the sort put up for children; another on mother's best monogrammed letter paper; a fourth on a scrap of greasy paper almost lost in the depths of a big "mailing" envelope, intended for a pamphlet or for photographs.

Most of them are written and addressed in childish vertical handwriting; many of them are printed; some leave no doubt of grown-up collaboration; and others are scratched over in inscrutable baby scrawl, mailed in the sweet assurance that the good saint will understand.

They are full of human nature, these Santa Claus letters. One from a youngster with an eye to business is carefully addressed to,

"Santa Claus' Workshops,
Toyland,
In the Icebergs of Greenland."

It runs:

Dear Santa Claus, This is to tell you about a splendid bargain I saw at the shops. You know the Daisy air guns. Well they cost a dollar most always; but the man at our store is selling them for 75 cents.

Isn't that good news? And praps if you want to buy a lot he mite let you have them for less. Please, Mister Sainty, if you aren't got any in you own shop buy some of these, and send me one. They are terrible nice and I want an air gun most of anything.

Your dear friend,

BERTIE.

Another comes from an embryo diplomatist down in Georgia, who writes:

Dere Mister Santa Claws:
The presents which you bring us last year was fine. You sure do know how to pick presents for a feller. And Mister Santa Claws, I do hope that this year you will bring me a railroad like you give Quentin Roosevelt, last year even if I ain't the President's son. My but I'd be proud to have a railway train like that and you sure

must have another in your shop. I know that you have the best shop in the world; you are such a good Santa Claws always making folks happy, so want you please bring me a railway train. Respectly yours

JOHNNIE.

Here is one that shows the heart-burning of a small writer, and the intensity of the hope that Santa Claus will relieve it:

Dear Kanty Klaws. Ples brin me a big doll, and a doll karage, and a set of dishes and a little stove, and oh dere Kanty, if you only wud brin me a blue silk dress and a pink parasol I wud be so glade. Cause Mamie Johnson, she got a blue silk dress and a pink parasol and she puts on airs over me cause I ain't got any, and my mamma she says I musn't mind it and mus just be happy without it cause my father he can't afford to buy me any. But, dere Kanty Claus, I can't be happy when mamie Johnson she got them and I ain't. So ples brin them to
Your luvlin little gurl.

BESSIE L.

Another is from a youth who evidently believes in "gettin' plenty, while you're a gettin' it"

My dear Saint Nicholas, please bring me a whole heap of toy guns and a war vessel with a search lite and a steam engine, and don't forget the sord. Bring Mazie a horn and a bugel. She's my sister and she can be bugel when I play soldier. And oblige your friend

TOAMIE ANDERSON.

To which the sister adds:
I don't want a bugel, dere Sainty, I want a doll, and oh hav it it a big doll that can shut its eyes and has hair, and I think it would be nice if you would bring a lot of candy and oranges and things, . . . I then I will be a good girl till next year.

That request for a doll rarely fails in the girls' letters. On the whole, the little girls are more modest in their demands than the boys. But a doll is nearly always the first thing asked for—always a doll, no matter how else they may want, bearing apparent testimony to the mother instinct inborn in all daughters of Eve.

One little girl, who is an exception to the rule of the reasonableness of the feminine demands on Kris Kringle wants "A doll, and a saddle for my money, and a bukey for my doll, and a cradle, a nice set of big dishes, a little doll house, with a stove and a washstand, a bed, a dresser, and a looking-glass, a komb and brush for my doll's hair, a little round table, with a lamp on it, and chairs and everything that goes in a doll house; besides I want a jumpin rope and a doll hammick Which I hope you won't forget to bring them all."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S FIRST INAUGURAL TRIED MEN'S SOULS

No inauguration from that of George Washington. In April, 1789, to that of Theodore Roosevelt, on March 4, 1896, was conducted under as gloomy and depressing circumstances as that of the first Republican President, March 4, 1861.

Disunion, by the method of secession, was the accepted doctrine of nearly all of the leaders in the Southern States, and passive submission to such secession was advocated by many of the most potent leaders in the North.

Several States had already seceded, and others were on the eve of doing the same, threats of assassination had been freely indulged in, and war, if necessary to accomplish disunion, was openly advocated.

Washington was practically the headquarters of the leaders of the secession movement; the departments were honeycombed with latent treason to the administration that was just about to come into power. From the very organization of the government the South had dominated in its legislation, and in shaping its policy, domestic and foreign, consequently a very large majority of those in office in Washington thought, as the leaders of the South thought; therefore, they were either in secret or open opposition to the new Republican party.

From the days when Thomas Jefferson was inaugurated with all republican simplicity there had been a continued growth in ostentation and display when a new head of the nation was to be installed. In the earlier years, Washington was almost out of the world to the rest of the country, but each recurring quadrennial ceremony attracted its crowd of sight-seers, and the opening of access by rail increased the number of those who came to witness the ceremonies. Of course, the

crowds then were infinitesimal compared with those who now come, but they taxed the hotel accommodations about as they are taxed now. I had visited Washington once during the closing year of Buchanan's administration, and being an ardent Republican, just having cast my first vote for Lincoln, I desired very much to see him inducted into office; so, about the last of February I boarded a train at Indianapolis and began the weary journey to Washington. It was a weary journey in those days, requiring about forty-eight hours, if no mishap occurred, and four or five changes of cars.

Change of Sentiment Noted.

Until we passed into Virginia at Wheeling, the expressions heard in the cars were nearly all in favor of the Republicans, and against what was denominated the arrogance of the Southern slaveocracy. At stations where the train stopped the same sentiments were heard, but when we touched Virginia all was changed. From there to Washington it was almost a continued round of denunciations of the Abolitionists and the "Black Republicans." No Democrat ever thought in those days of speaking of a Republican as anything else than a "Black Republican." When he was addressed to profanity, even in a mild form, he accompanied the term with an adjective the very antipodes of respectability.

When we arrived in Washington we found it a seething whirl of denunciations and abuse, almost all a man's life was worth to announce himself as a Republican, or even to let it be known that he was from a Northern State. So strong was this feeling that some members of our party registered themselves at the hotel as being from Kentucky. The hotels and bars were filled with crowds of Southerners, threatening dire vengeance

and broils were of almost hourly occurrence.

I witnessed one that occurred in the bar attached to the Metropolitan Hotel. A small party had gone into the bar for some refreshment. Among them was a gentleman from Michigan, who had been trained up in the Zach Chandler school. The party was quiet, and had no disposition to get into a brawl with any one. The Michiganian was of a short, but very stocky frame, and was one of the most quiet and pleasant spoken men I have ever met. The party had hardly arranged itself alongside the bar before half a dozen men entered who had evidently been drinking more than was good for them. They were from the South, and by no means choice in the language they used concerning Mr. Lincoln, or of those who had supported him at the election. One of them soon noticed our little party, and by some subtle instinct conceived we were Northerners, and addressed himself to us.

At first we paid no attention to him, and this seemed to anger him. At last he applied a more than usually degrading phrase to those who voted for Mr. Lincoln. At this, our Michiganian quietly said: "Do you intend to apply that remark to me?" This was asked in no quiet tone, but in a tone that nobody believed anything would come of it. The Southerner had not noticed the glint in the eye of his querist, and replied, with an oath, that he did, if he had voted for Lincoln.

Cleaned Out the Crowd.

The words had not died on the air before the left arm of the man from Michigan suddenly shot out, the fingers of the hand closing round the throat of the speaker. With a quick motion, and almost without an effort, he raised him clear from the floor, and then came the

climax. Straight from the shoulder came a blow from the right hand, and the Southerner fell limp to the floor without life or motion. The sound of the blow was like that of a triphammer striking against a pile. Without raising his voice, the Northern defender of Mr. Lincoln, in a drawing tone, inquired if any one wanted to take up the cudgels, saying he was ready to administer the same dose to any number.

Of course all was confusion and pistols were speedily drawn. Our champion made no move toward displaying any arms, but, with a smile of contempt, looked at the crowd surging around him. His eye watched every movement, however, and while some were trying to raise his victim from the floor, another resounding blow was heard, and a man was seen to go crashing through the front window, as if propelled by dynamite. He was endeavoring to aim a revolver from what he supposed was a secure position, when he was observed by the Northerner, who quickly pushed the two men aside and let his powerful fist do its work.

This cowardly attempt at murder aroused all his ire. He grasped another of the crowd by the middle and used him as a cudgel, knocking right and left until half a dozen sweating men were on the floor. He then tossed his human war club to one side, remarking: "I guess they will behave better in the future. Let us go, boys." By this time the attention of the police had been attracted, and as they came pushing in at the front, we quickly slipped out at the side, and soon were in our rooms at the hotel. This was only one of the many scenes of violence that took place in the two or three days preceding the inauguration.

The morning of the 4th of March

dawned cold, dark, and rainy. The weather seemed to be in complete harmony with the gloom that was casting its dark shadow over the whole country. For many days rumors and been rife that efforts would be made to prevent the inauguration, by force, and thereby throw the country into anarchy and chaos. Acting on these, Gen. Winfield Scott, commander-in-chief of the army, had ordered all the available troops to Washington, and during the night of the 3d he stationed a battery or two at convenient points, and prepared the thousand or more regulars for speedy and effective work in case a riot should be started. These precautions effectually overawed those disposed to create a disturbance. When the time came for Mr. Lincoln to start for the Capitol to take the office, a strong guard of regular soldiers surrounded the carriage. Gen. Scott himself, surrounded by his staff, had his station near one of the batteries.

At the Capitol arms had secretly been taken into the Senate chamber and the hall of the House, and many members carried revolvers in their pockets. The Republicans and the loyal element of the North had determined that Mr. Lincoln should be inaugurated, and they prepared to fight for their rights, if necessary. A large number of rifles and muskets were stored at convenient points in the Capitol, under charge of trusted guards. Notwithstanding all these precautions every one wore a look of uneasiness, and all realized the country was facing a most terrible crisis.

Early on the evening of the 3d word was sent quietly around among those known to be from the North that their presence was desired at a certain room on the avenue, and we were requested to appear singly or not more than three at a time. Together with two others from

my State I visited the room. We were told that it was thought the regulars and the militia could not be relied upon, but it was not certain, so it had been determined to organize a force of those visitors known to be loyal to secretly act as guards. We were assigned certain stations, mine being on the front of the Capitol, not far away from where Mr. Lincoln would stand while delivering his address. At an early hour I reported to the Capitol to Representative James Wilson, father of John Wilson, late Senator from the State of Washington.

Long before the hour fixed for the ceremonies, a vast crowd gathered in front of the platform. It was a larger crowd than I had ever seen at a public meeting, and I then estimated it at many thousands, but, in reality I do not suppose it exceeded 5,000 or 6,000. Everywhere in the crowd were stationed members of our secret organization, all ready to interfere should any demonstration be made against the incoming President. About 20 of us were around the platform, our duty being to immediately close around Mr. Lincoln at the first sign of trouble. We were elated that our party had triumphed, but a feeling of depression oppressed us. At the proper time the tall, ungainly form of our Chief appeared, accompanied by Senator Bacon of Oregon.

Mr. Lincoln's Manner.
Mr. Lincoln looked careworn, but exhibited no trepidation when he turned to face the audience. A cold wind was blowing, but he stood uncovered while he read in measured tones that matchless address. The solemnity of the occasion evidently impressed him, and he enunciated every word with an earnestness that carried conviction to every one near enough to hear him. The address was clothed in the most simple language, for

in he is, and how she "tuvs him the bestest of all the saints," continues:

Dere good Santa please bring me a littel sister. Id ruvver have a littel sissier than any other pressunt, fur i'm very lonestum littel gurl. Dere nice Santa. Gud by.

There are probably in the neighborhood of half a million of these letters received at the various post-offices and forwarded to the Dead Letter Office during the weeks immediately preceding Christmas.

For eleven months in the year Santa Claus has absolutely no correspondents. Then for one busy month more letters are addressed to him than to any individual or firm in the country.

There are fat letters and lean letters, big letters and small. The addresses on most of them are perfectly legible, and on a large majority postage has been paid, though the stamp is likely to be anywhere but in the usual place.

Sometimes in the stamp corner are some hieroglyphics that undoubtedly stand for kisses, which Uncle Sam certainly ought to be willing to accept as legal tender under the circumstances.

There is only one thing to do with most of these letters, and that is to destroy them. When a letter reaches the dead letter office, if the authorities have been unsuccessful in finding the addressee, and if there is nothing on the outside of the envelope to indicate where it originated, the communication is opened and a search is made inside for the identity of the sender.

This course is followed in the case of the Santa Claus correspondence. In not one case in a thousand is there anything on the outside to indicate the sources of these letters, and, as a rule, there is very little inside.

They are usually dated, but the name of the town in which the writer lives is seldom given. Many of the signatures are merely the Christian names of the writers, or more frequently still some childish pet name.

All these wails of the mail, these piteous little appeals that Uncle Sam cannot possibly answer, are sent to the dead letter office to be read with a smile, and sigh by the clerks in Mrs. Collins' division, and to be consigned finally to the postal graveyard. When the annual deluge begins, along about the first of December, an extra force of clerks is put to work to handle the Santa Claus mail, and Uncle Sam, in the midst of the responsibilities of running a great and strenuous nation, finds himself quoting ruefully:

Christmas comes but once a year,
And when it comes—oh, dear! oh, dear!

Santa Claus North Pole
Mrs. Santa Claus
Santa Claus
Santa Claus
Santa Claus